A

LETTER

FROM

REV. ROBERT J. BRECKINRIDGE, D.D.,

CONCERNING

"A North Carolina Pastor."

RE-PRINTED FROM

THE PRESBYTERIAN BANNER AND ADVOCATE.

PHILADELPHIA:

JOSEPH M. WILSON, PUBLISHER,

No. 111 SOUTH TENTH STREET, BELOW CHESTNUT ST.

1858.

☞ Single copies of this letter, *six cents;* five copies, *twenty-five cents,* and thirty copies for *one dollar*—free of postage. Those wishing copies will please address the publisher.

LETTER.*

DANVILLE, KY., MARCH 19TH, 1858.

REV. DR. M'KINNEY:

Dear Sir:—It is only to-day that I have received your note of the 4th inst., and your paper of the 6th. They probably arrived here very soon after I left this place, two weeks ago, on a visit designed to last a few days, but extended by severe sickness, from which I have not yet recovered, to two weeks.

Your published article and your private note are in very remarkable contrast with the conduct of *Mr. J. Jones Smyth*, (*the* North Carolina Pastor.) You have had, before this, reason, as you supposed, to complain of my treatment of you as harsh, if not unkind; and yet you have acted in a matter in which my character was at stake, justly and considerately toward me. He, with many professions of habitual admiration for me, unprovoked, and personally an entire stranger to me, assails me under a mask, with the utmost exhibition of personal malignity, and without regard to any thing but the self-conceit and malevolence which seem to prompt him. That I may render justice in both quarters, I offer to you my thanks, and my acknowledgments of high consideration, not for the judgment you render, but for the upright spirit with which you render it; and I offer to the public, accompanied with whatever weight may belong to my name and character, the two letters

* When the remarks of "*A North Carolina Pastor*" appeared in the columns of the *North Carolina Presbyterian*, a weekly newspaper lately started in *Fayetteville, North Carolina*, we, in common with all lovers of the TRUTH, waited for a response from the venerable author of "The Knowledge of God." This Response, so clear and full, is now offered in a more permanent form than the columns of a newspaper present, in order that it may be widely circulated and do good; and may the lesson it teaches not be lost on those who require tuition.

which accompany this communication, that Mr. J. Jones Smyth may *receive*, while he does, what he professes to consider, justice. The receipt of your private note is the immediate reason why I send these two letters for publication in your paper. They came into my hands along with your note, and, of course, belong to the public, who have a perfect right to know who this great light is. You will see that, according to the testimony of others, it is the old story of the fellow who was detected with stolen goods, crying, "Stop thief!" while, according to his own explanation, a miracle worthy of the Jesuits, whom he imitates—perhaps serves—was wrought in his case: namely, that he and the sainted M'Cheyne, each without the knowledge of the other, took down, with verbal accuracy, divers *sermons*, from *Expository Lectures*, delivered by Dr. Welsh, to them at different times; and yet, *his* was still *his!* The conduct of the editors of the *North Carolina Presbyterian*, in first publishing and then endorsing this attack of this person upon me, without any of them giving me the least intimation who he was, renders it impossible for me to extend to them the courtesy of asking the use of their columns under such an influence; or recognising any of them in any light, except that of persons seeking my disgrace, by means whose supposed efficacy is all they care about. You will observe that I omit the name of the gentleman to whom Mr. J. Jones Smyth writes, and who writes to me. Mr. J. Jones Smyth can make the name public, if he likes.

PETERSBURG, VA., MARCH 3D, 1858.

DR. BRECKINRIDGE,—*Dear Sir:*—I read, in the *Presbyterian* of the 20th of February, a notice of some correspondent of the *North Carolina* Presbyterian paper, charging you with plagiarism. I met Mr. Hugh Nelson, one of the elders of the First Church here, and told him that it could be no other person than Mr. J. Jones Smyth, although I had not heard such an intimation. In the *Presbyterian* of 27th, I read the communication of S. B. J. I find he says it is a North Carolina pastor; and to-day I have it from

undoubted authority that I was right in my suspicion. In 1848 I was a member of the First Presbyterian Church in this city; and when our beloved John Leyburn, our pastor, left us, this Mr. Smyth lectured for us occasionally. I think one night immediately preceding lecture night, I read in my family circle the twenty-fourth sermon of the Rev. Robert M. M'Cheyne: text, Song of Solomon ii. 8—17. The next night, he lectured for us. Mrs. —— was with me; and much to my surprise, he commenced and delivered, I may say *verbatim*, the above-named sermon, without saying one word about its being another's property. After we went home we referred to it again, and found we were not mistaken in any one point in the discourse. The next morning, I took the book of sermons and went to Mr. Samuel Donnell with it, (he being Mr. Smyth's particular friend and associate,) and asked him if he would not like to read that beautiful lecture delivered to us last night by J. Jones Smyth. He said he would. I produced the book, opened to it; he read, and said it was a fact. I then gave him the book, and asked him to give it to Mr. Smyth, that I requested him to read it, which he did; and the enclosed letter to you is what he sent to me. I did not go to see Mr. S., and Mr. S. did not come to see me. I send you this letter to show you what he says he thinks of a plagiarist, and how sacred he looks on the ministerial office.

My Dear Sir, I am a stranger to you. I do not wish to injure Mr. S. or any one living; but justice is what I hope I love; and if I did not feel that it was my duty to give you this information, I would not do it. I am an elder in Dr. Pryor's church in this city, the Second Church. Dr. Plumer knows who I am, or my former pastor, Rev. John Leyburn. I remain yours, with much respect,

——— ———

INSTITUTE, NOV. 30TH, 1848.

DEAR SIR:—To my very great astonishment, my friend, Mr. S. Donnell, informed me yesterday that the same lecture which I delivered on Tuesday evening, was contained in a volume of Posthumous Sermons of Rev. R. M. M'Cheyne, late of Dundee, Scotland. As it was the first time I had heard of the existence of such a book, I asked the favour of looking at it. My lecture I took from the

short-hand notes I made of Dr. Welsh's series of expository lectures, which he delivered to the Divinity students in the University of Edinburgh, in the winter of 1838. And as these lectures are repeated to the different classes as they come under the Professor's charge, so various ministers have an opportunity of hearing, and noting them down. Mr. M'Cheyne was taught by the same men from whom I learned my Theology, and I am very sure that he never would have consented to the publication of sermons taken from his Professor's notes without explanation, had it pleased the Lord to prolong his useful life. As I consider it a grievous stain upon any man's character to be liable to the charge of appropriating another's property, whether it be the produce of his bodily or mental exertions, I have thought it right to trouble you with this explanation, assuring you that I have never owned nor seen a copy of M'Cheyne's sermons, save the one which Mr. Donnell brought and told me was yours. The subject and substance of that lecture, and *some others*, I took from my note-books, which, in short-hand, you can at any time see, only honouring me with a call, either at the Institute or my residence. That same lecture, I find, on recurring to my memorandum book, I delivered—though without any written notes—about three-and-a-half years ago, in the Presbyterian church in Winchester. If you had come to me as a brother in Christ, and told me your charge of plagiarism at first, I could have at once, by means of those stubborn facts—*dates*—convinced you that it was impossible for me to copy M'Cheyne; and now I must beg that you will do me the favour and justice of accompanying with this explanation whatever remarks you may have any where made, regarding my honesty.

As I am comparatively a stranger in Petersburgh and to the congregation, such a charge is a very heavy one. I feel satisfied that where and by whom I am known it would not be credited. I have written to a friend in New York for a copy of M'Cheyne's Sermons, for the purpose of seeing whether any other of his published discourses are from the same source, from which I feel at perfect liberty to draw for aid in expository lectures. I have no notes of sermons by the Professors. I prefer this private mode of explanation to the making a public explanation in the lecture room.

A minister's character is a very sacred thing, and therefore I hope you will see the propriety, for the sake of Christ's cause, of my making this explanation to you, as, only on that account, I should not condescend to notice any charge brought against me. I am, very sincerely,

Your brother in Christian bonds,

——— ———, Esq. J. Jones Smyth.

P. S.—I asked Mr. Donnell's permission to use his name as I have done, and he tells me that you were good enough to say that it was as my friend you came to him, and therefore you will not consider that there is any reflection conveyed in the remark made in the preceding page, in line sixteen. J. J. S.

With reference to the charges made against me by Mr. J. Jones Smyth—and endorsed by the *North Carolina Presbyterian*, and by the nine editors of the *American Presbyterian*, headed by the *Rev. B. J. Wallace* of Philadelphia, and by the *Christian Intelligencer* of New York, in the interest of Rationalistic butcheries of our English Bible, and by others, perhaps, of whom I have no knowledge—it may be proper for me to add a very few words, if you will do me the favour to print them. The original charges were, under various forms, these two: 1. That my *method* was anticipated by Chalmers. 2. That the *substance* of *two* Chapters, (the XVIII. and XIX.,) was *taken* from Stapfer. But the forms of these charges soon settled into the one form: that the *substance* of the book itself was *plagiarized* from Stapfer, and the *method* of it was *plagiarized* from Chalmers. All that I have answered to such charges was, that they were false and malicious, in letter and in spirit; that the whole attack was a conspiracy for definite and wicked ends—ferocious in its manner, infamous in its conception—and that I could treat it no otherwise than I would treat a brutal attempt at personal assassination. I can say nothing else. If there is any thing certain under the sun, it is, that the *substance* of the *whole* book—good and bad—is mine, and is not Stapfer's; and that the *method*

of the *whole* book is mine, and is not Chalmers'. In my letter to Rev. Dr. Hill, I stated that I had never even had Chalmers' Institutes of Theology in my hands; and that the charge of plagiarizing from him was, therefore, merely absurd. Since then, I have examined Chalmers' system carefully, and am obliged to say that the allegation that there is any similarity even between his method and mine, can be founded only in pure incapacity to understand either of them, or in mere inveterate habits of untruth. As to the Stapfer part of the case, besides the full notice I gave in my preliminary words; besides the dishonest translations and collocations of Mr. J. Jones Smyth; besides the taking by Stapfer, from others, of *every thing* he had, with more freedom than I have taken *any thing* from him; besides the limited extent and wholly subordinate nature of such of his *details* as I used at all; besides the wicked exaggerations of Mr. Smyth, and the abominable falsehoods of his equally unscrupulous endorsers; there is a remark, touching the whole matter, so obvious and decisive, that I wonder it did not occur to Mr. Smyth himself, even through all his massive self-conceit and ignorance. The volume I have published was, on its face, designed to be a statement —not experimental—not controversial—but purely and strictly *abstract-scientific.* I set out to prove—by the testimony *of God, and of pure reason*—a system of *positive truth unto salvation.* I reserved the experimental part to a second book; the controversial part to a third book. In the first, or purely abstract part, already published, and in the second, or purely experimental part, next to be published, God's Word, and pure reason, could alone be of any authority. In them, why should any human being's opinion previously expressed—any human being's name—be cited, as such, any more than in a Geometry? Above all human beings, what title had they (Stapfer amongst the rest,) to special mention, who bore to certain parts of the subject a relation, at the very highest, similar to that borne by a

Dictionary to a language, or an Arithmetic to an account? The course I actually took is the only one, I confidently assert, that became me as a scholar, as a modest man, or as the author of a work avowedly designed, not to *create or invent* any thing, but to *recast, restate* a sublime science, by a natural, simple method, responsive to its own nature. And I as confidently assert that the charges which have been made against me are amongst the highest evidences of the necessity of the work I have done; for they show the deplorable ignorance of those who pretended to know, and the deplorable wickedness of those who pretended to believe. What is this, that the pretended teachers of God's people should assail a book, the *truth* of which they do not call in question; and upon pretexts the most stupid or the most wicked, assail the personal character of its author, without controverting the smallest thing in the book, which he ever claimed as peculiarly his own? And is the getting of this dead fly, this ancient and apparently habitual plagiarist, into the ointment of the apothecary, to make it all stink?

I reiterate what I said in my letter to Dr. Hill: that I will not defend my own work; it is my personal character that I desire to place in its true light; my personal assailants that I desire should understand the disdain with which I look upon their malice and falsehood. My book is at the disposal of men, to use or abuse, as suits their humour. I am doing my best to make the second volume superior to the first; the third superior to the second. These miserable revilers were never in my contemplation, when I dedicated my first volume to "*the penitent and believing followers of the Saviour of sinners.*" From *them,* I have nothing but applause; applause as far above my merits, as these rancorous attacks are beyond my weakness and errors.

Your brother in Christ,

ROBT. J. BRECKINRIDGE.